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ABSTRACT

Recently the Peru State College Library (Nebraska) had an opportunity to use a special acquisitions grant to study the effects of removing librarian bias in one area of its collection. This study considers the use of the items selected for this grant by humanities faculty and compares their use with other items selected by both librarians and faculty over the relevant three year period, thereby demonstrating the effects of outside involvement in library selection. The grant was provided in support of "non-Western" (i.e., not European and not white American) studies, to remedy a perceived gap in the curriculum and the library collection. Materials selected for this grant would not have been selected in the normal library selection process. All of the items processed after July 1, 1993 were assigned an item code based on the process by which they entered the collection. The library database routinely records the number of times each item is checked out. At the end of the spring semester in 1996, circulation statistics were recorded for all of the 1993-1996 acquisitions. Results showed that the non-Western grant materials were used less than the librarian-selected materials, but slightly more than other faculty-selected materials. Four tables present results. (AEF)

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PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN SELECTION

The Eternal Question of Faculty vs. Librarian Selection of Materials

by

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In examining the effectiveness of selection procedures, it has been traditional to compare the choices of librarians against those of faculty. This method leads to a falsely adversarial impression as well as obscuring the chief benefits of wide-spread faculty participation in the selection process: an increased diversity and breadth for the collection and some protection from the latent prejudices of librarians. Most professional librarians are busy enough with budgetary restrictions and external attempts at censorship, and therefore find little time to devote to considering the dangers of self-censorship. While it is easy to verbalize opposition to self-censorship, it is difficult to analyze or quantify the results of these selection decisions, since, by definition, those items which are not selected are not available for study. Recently, the Peru State College Library had an unusual opportunity to study the effects of removing librarian bias in one area of its collection, with a special acquisitions grant. It is the purpose of this study to consider the use of the items selected for this grant and to compare their use with other items selected by both librarians and faculty

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over the relevant three year period, thereby demonstrating the effects of outside involvement in library selection.

The Non-Western Materials Grant

The grant in question was provided by the College administration in support of "non-Western" (i.e., not European and not white American) studies, to remedy a perceived gap in the curriculum and the library collection. It was administered by faculty, primarily from the Humanities Division, although library staff did the acquisition and processing of the materials. Selection of the materials was done in the late spring of 1994 and most of the items were received and cataloged in the 1994-95 fiscal year. A few items arrived in the late spring of 1995 and were not processed until the 1995-96 fiscal year.

Materials selected for this grant would not have been selected in the normal library selection process. Staff and librarian comments were frequent, including "Who is going to read this stuff?", "If we had had the money we could have bought something that would be really used, " and "It's a shame to spend money on stuff our students won't use, when we could be spending it on things they really need." Such comments were not apparent when librarians or staff handled other faculty requests, which constitute about three quarters of Peru State acquisitions, thus indicating a strong bias or prejudice against these materials. Most of the materials purchased through the grant were fiction of Africa, the Near East, and the Caribbean, with some Native American authors thrown in. The position of these purchases in the collection was further

complicated by the fact that the Library has had a ten year moratorium on purchasing adult fiction of any variety.

It was therefore decided that this collection constitutes a valuable opportunity to examine the effects of self-censorship. The materials would not have been selected by the librarians or by the faculty if this specialized grant had not been provided. They could be easily identified and traced in the library database. They could also be easily compared to those items selected under the more traditional procedures. The questions to be studied were, of course, whether the library staff was correct: Did this material get used at least as much as other material acquired at the same time? Would librarian selection have produced higher rates of use?

Methodology

All of the items processed after July 1, 1993, were assigned an item code based on the process by which they entered the collection. All serials and standing orders were removed from the study, as were all reference books, bound periodicals, microforms, and other non-circulating material. Gifts and items which were acquired outside of the library budget were assigned codes which have been collected together in this study as "Gifts/Grants". The specific Non-Western grant materials were assigned the code "n" and have been listed as a subset of "Gifts/Grants" in the tables. In addition, since the Non-Western grant was administered by faculty from the Humanities Division, the comparative effectiveness of divisional selection was deemed relevant, and all four divisions

have been listed as subsets of "Faculty". "Administration" was also evaluated as a separate category in this study, although the extremely small numbers and erratic patterns of circulation suggest that this area of selection may not be measurably predictable.

The library database routinely records the number of times each item is checked out. At the end of the spring semester in 1996, circulation statistics were recorded for all of the 1993-1996 acquisitions. For each category the percentage of items which had circulated at all was determined for each year's acquisitions and for all three years combined. The total number of circulations was also tabulated in each category. This study included only traditional checkouts. Renewals and use while on the reserve desk were deleted from the calculations. Finally, adjustment was made for the differing sizes of the categories, and total circulation was expressed as a figure for every hundred items acquired in each category. All data collected represented a period from the time of acquisition until May of 1996. Thus, for the 1993-94 materials nearly three years of circulation is included, and much of the 1995-96 material has had almost no opportunity to be checked out yet. Most of the Non-Western grant material was acquired near the middle of this circulation period, so that the circulation statistics are more readily comparable.

Results

For each year's acquisitions, the number of items added and the number of items which circulated at least once were placed in a table, along with the

percentage indicating the rate of circulation for that category. Then the total number of checkouts was computed, removing renewals and reserves, and the resulting figure was divided by the number of items added, expressed in hundreds, to yield a figure representing the frequency at which the items in any

Table 1. Items Acquired 1993-94
(Circulation as of May 7, 1996)

Selector	n	# circ. at least once	% circ. at least once	Total Circs.	Total Circs/100
Administration	17	16	94%	45	265
Gifts/Grants	303	99	33%	221	73
Non-Western	-	-	-	-	-
Librarians	237	161	68%	446	188
Faculty	987	586	59%	1,411	143
Business Div.	207	111	54%	230	111
Education Div.	304	195	64%	595	196
Humanities Div.	285	167	59%	362	127
Science Div.	191	113	59%	224	117
Total	1,544	862	56%	2,123	138

Table 2. Items Acquired 1994-95
(Circulation as of May 7, 1996)

Selector	n	# circ. at least once	% circ. at least once	Total Circs.	Total Circs/100
Administration	12	6	50%	8	67
Gifts/Grants	388	167	43%	367	95
Non-Western	233	123	53%	288	124
Librarians	172	109	63%	364	212
Faculty	860	443	52%	906	105
Business Div.	241	110	46%	179	74
Education Div.	260	154	59%	363	140
Humanities Div.	169	88	52%	192	114
Science Div.	190	91	48%	172	91
Total	1,432	725	51%	1,645	115

Table 3. Items Acquired 1995-96
(Circulation as of May 7, 1996)

Selector	n	# circ. at least once	% circ. at least once	Total Circs.	Total Circs/100
Administration	13	7	54%	9	69
Gifts/Grants	930	45	5%	64	7
Non-Western	5	3	60%	3	60
Librarians	78	21	27%	30	38
Faculty	537	220	41%	279	52
Business Div.	46	14	30%	14	30
Education Div.	110	48	44%	71	65
Humanities Div.	244	132	54%	163	67
Science Div.	137	26	19%	31	23
Total	1,558	293	19%	382	25

Table 4. Items Acquired 1993-96, three years combined
(Circulation as of May 7, 1996)

Selector	n	# circ. at least once	% circ. at least once	Total Circs.	Total Circs/100
Administration	42	29	69%	62	148
Gifts/Grants	1,621	311	19%	652	40
Non-Western	238	126	53%	291	122
Librarians	487	291	60%	840	172
Faculty	2,384	1,249	52%	2,596	109
Business Div.	494	235	48%	423	86
Education Div.	674	397	59%	1,029	153
Humanities Div.	698	387	55%	717	103
Science Div.	518	230	44%	427	82
Total	4,534	2,049	45%	4,150	92

given category circulate. This data is listed in Tables 1-3, representing data from the three years covered in the study. Finally, the statistics were combined

for the three year period and listed in Table 4, to give a more general over-all picture.

If the category "Administration" is removed due to small size and erratic statistics, then librarian selected items circulated the most of any remaining category, both in percentage of items used at least once and in total circulations for each hundred items acquired. This difference is clear in the combined statistics and in the first two years of the study. In the most recent year, use of faculty selected items was much more prominent, suggesting that further longitudinal study may be necessary to complete an accurate picture. It should also be noted that during the current year, faculty selections were acquired first and librarian selections were received later, allowing little if any time for circulation to accumulate.

Within the faculty categories, items selected by the Education Division show the greatest use. This is not surprising since this is the only division with a graduate program. The Humanities Division follows closely in rate of use as well as frequency of use.

For all the materials acquired in this time period, over half had not ever been checked out at the time these statistics were gathered. They also averaged less than one check out for every item acquired. Some of this low circulation can be attributed to the fact that the least used category, "Gifts/Grants" represented a third of the library's acquisitions during this time period. Furthermore, the largest single gift over this time period, an absorption of the Music Department listening lab materials, was added in the 1995-96 year,

leaving little time for more than half of the gifts to be used at all, even at the lower rate.

The Non-Western grant materials were used less than the librarian-selected materials, but slightly more than other faculty-selected materials. Usage for the Non-Western grant ranked below that of the Education Division materials, but higher than that of other materials selected by the Humanities faculty. All of these segments of the collection (Non-Western grant, Education Division, Humanities Division, Librarian-selected material) had higher rates of use and higher frequency of use than the average for materials acquired during this time period.

Conclusions

The librarians were probably correct in their assessment that materials they would have selected would have circulated more than did those of the Non-Western grant. This is true at least to the extent that the items they did select under the traditional acquisitions procedure can be said to be equivalent to what they would have selected if given the opportunity.

They were not correct, however, in assuming that this material would not be used at all or would be used less than the rest of the collection. It is clear that this material has been circulating at least as much as other recent acquisitions, and more than most faculty-selected items. In fact, this material has been circulating more than other materials selected by the faculty of this same division, suggesting a plethora of interesting questions.

While use of the collection must be considered as an important measure of the effectiveness of selection in an undergraduate library, it is by no means the only criterion. If circulation statistics were the chief criterion for success, then academic library collections would look a great deal more like those of public libraries. In fact, many other considerations go into determining the quality and appropriateness of any given collection.

One of these considerations is access to a diversity of viewpoints and ideas. In an academic setting, academic freedom and an unfettered search for often non-traditional ideas is essential to learning. From this vantage point, the Non-Western grant was extremely successful, in that it added material which did not match the selection criteria of the library, material which would not have been selected by the librarians or the faculty in the normal selection procedure. Furthermore, this material fell well within the usage patterns and parameters of the other materials being selected by both faculty and librarians. There can be no doubt that this was a useful and beneficial addition to the Peru State College collection.

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